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Images of Music and Musicians as Indicators of Status, Wealth and Political Power on Roman Funerary Monuments

Summary

Investigations of pictorial representations of Roman musical instruments and musicians have established that in funerary contexts they were used by the artist as a tool to draw attention to the wealth and the political or social status of the dead person or his/her family. This article provides an overview of the results of this analysis based on examples from Republican, Imperial and Late Antique contexts. Its purpose is to explore some of the changes that can be observed, affecting both the meanings of the topics that were selected to ornament funerary monuments and their implications for the changing role of the musician in everyday life

Keywords: musicians; instruments; symbolic meaning; iconography; identity; political status; *familia*; Roman Empire

Untersuchungen bildlicher Darstellungen von Musikinstrumenten sowie Musikantinnen und Musikanten haben ergeben, dass sie in Grabkontexten benutzt wurden, um auf den Wohlstand sowie den politischen oder sozialen Status der verstorbenen Person oder ihrer Familie hinzuweisen. Dieser Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über die Ergebnisse der Analyse, basierend auf Beispielen aus republikanischen, imperialen und spätantiken Kontexten. Ziel des Beitrags ist, Veränderungen zu untersuchen, die sich sowohl auf die Bedeutung der für die Grabmäler gewählten Themen als auch auf die Rolle der Musikantinnen und Musikanten im Alltag auswirkten.

Keywords: Musikant*innen; Instrumente; symbolische Bedeutung; Ikonographie; Identität; politischer Status; *familia*; Römisches Reich

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1 Introduction

In Roman society music was as constant and ubiquitous a part of life as it was in any ancient civilisation. The value Romans attached to it is clearly and richly evidenced by various kinds of sources from pre-Republican times through the Republic and Empire to the Late Roman period. One of its most remarkable applications appears to have been in the formation and maintenance of kinship identities and family reputations. Amongst conspicuous instances of its exploitation was its use by officials of the Empire, of the provinces or of individual communities: people who valued their reputations as patrons of the performing arts or other manifestations for the delight of a large audience (like gladiatorial games) and – sometimes – as their skilled exponents. But such cultural use also permeated the wider social and institutional fabric of Roman life, finding frequent expression in the no less political milieux of family and community, especially amongst those families which had status to consolidate or further advancement to pursue. It is this aspect, music's aptness to the politics of social class and mobility, that will form the context of this chapter. I will provide evidence to show that, perhaps echoing Greek theorists, Roman families recognised the political impact of certain kinds of music, and sought to project something of their own prestige through their choices of particular musical topoi for their funerary monuments. Musical taste was an aspect of character by which they wished to be remembered and themselves to be measured.

2 On the state of research

Some scholars of Roman culture today pursue thematic investigations into different aspects of music, such as its role in the army, in the various cults and in sports, including gladiatorial games. Others focus their attention on organology: on the materiality of specific types and 'families' of musical instrument, such as stringed and so-called 'brass' instruments.[1]

From a methodological point of view, research on Roman music draws its evidence from a variety of ancient sources: epigraphical, philological, iconographical and archaeological. An important difference between these disparate approaches lies in the procedures chosen to evaluate each type of information.[2] Early researchers tended to regard each piece of information as self-evident, without seeking corroboration from other sources; others have since preferred to validate each piece through correlation with other extant evidence. Today many accept the awkward truth that all of this information is to

1 For example: Fleischhauer 1964; Pinette 1993; Fless 1995; Vendries 1999; Landels 2001; Alexandrescu 2010.

2 Behn 1912; cf. Vendries 1999, 19–40; Alexandrescu 2010, 20–33; see also Homo-Lechner 1998.

a greater or lesser extent problematic, sometimes due to its scarcity and often because we still lack the full knowledge necessary to establish its original meaning.

This contribution will focus on aspects of the iconography of musicians and musical instruments found on Roman funerary monuments.[3] Bearing in mind the specific focus of the meeting and of the present volume, relationships between sound and political condition will be stressed. This will allow exploration of the 'soundscapes' of Roman society as they changed throughout history. Funerary monuments provide specific information on individual Romans: a particular person within a family, a *familia*,[4] with a specific relationship to the community in which he or she lived. The random character of the preserved information, as well as the small number of people who could have afforded to commission funerary monuments with elaborate sculpted reliefs, delineates the parameters of research, while at the same time informing us of a particular characteristic in our observations. These may be compared and contrasted with other kinds of *realia* (such as archaeological finds of objects) and other categories of persons commemorated, in order to place conclusions within a broad theoretical framework: taking into account motives that may underlie choices of subject and evaluating the extent to which realism has played a part in the portrayal of individuals, situations and objects.

3 Funerary monuments bearing information relevant to this discussion

In the chambers of Etruscan tombs of the 4th-century BCE decoration was applied to the walls in the form of painting, sometimes in painted relief. The commonest subject involving musical instruments and/or musicians are wedding and banquet scenes.[5] Later, during the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE, tombs came to include urns and coffins with relief decoration indicative of thematic change: processions of city magistrates,[6] wedding ceremonies (showing processions or escorts of the bride and groom), or myths. During this time, one constant and significant element was the presence of weapons and noise-making items, like trumpets, which were used in war. These could have been displayed as actual objects of personal inventory or shown in depictions near the entrance of the chambers. In this period the presence of two musical instruments (conventionally called

3 The paper summarizes a larger survey by the author, of which publication is now in preparation.

4 The Roman *familia* was the basic political and social unit of ancient Rome. It included the members of the immediate family as well as grandparents and slaves who lived in the same household.

5 Blanck and Proietti 1986; Steingräber 1985, nos. 48 (Tomba Bruschi, Tarquinia); 34 (Tomba degli Hescanas, Orvieto); 33 (Tomba Gollini II, the 'Tomba delle due Bighe', Orvieto).

6 For urns, see Körte 1916, pls. 84.2, 85.3–4, 86.5, 92.5. For sarcophagi: Herbig 1952, nos. 5 (Boston); 83 (Vulci).

cornu and *lituus*, due to their resemblance to later Roman examples) was indicative of the personal wealth which the head of a family enjoyed.[7]

In Rome and in fact throughout Italy during the Republican and early Imperial era, funerary buildings with relief friezes, as well as urns and gravestones in the shape of altars,[8] continued an Etruscan tradition of depicting on friezes one of the most important gifts an individual could give to a community: games and gladiatorial displays. Such gifts were made either in celebration of important events in the life of the community or as part of funerary celebrations organized by a family. The Roman era is also one that sees the production of the first examples of gravestones and sarcophagi of musicians (both men and women), some of them depicted with representations of instruments and/or portraits.[9] Later, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, almost every category of funerary monument period offers examples of interest to music archaeologists. The richest group comprises sarcophagi, especially those with more complex iconographic compositions, while gravestones and funerary altars continued to be decorated with musical instruments and portraits. Ornamental motifs were chosen from the thematic elements associated with the rich Dionysiac and Apollinic repertoires, but with prominence given to elements related to the afterlife. Therefore the presence of an individual type of instrument, such as panpipes, *tibiae* or cymbals, can rarely be interpreted as more than a convention of funerary iconography.

The original locations of the different kinds of monument do not follow general rules. They could be on display along the streets, in funerary precincts or chambers, or in *columbaria*.[10] The present context of placement is not always relevant, or indeed a reliable indicator of origin, due to the tendency to recycle stone monuments as building materials, a practice that was already current in Antiquity.

In the provinces there are specific funerary constructions, with a customized iconographical program that mainly comprises scenes of everyday life and funerary banquets, but which might also include untypical scenes such as games and subjects related to the main activities of a family or of the specific person commemorated: for example, in commerce, in navigation or in agriculture. In the Late Roman period examples are rather rare. Sarcophagi[11] remain our main source, showing examples of processions, domestic scenes and complex mythological schemata such as (often ambiguously) Orpheus singing to the animals.

Besides representations of musicians on gravestones, musicians' figures were used by artists as a symbol to indicate to the viewer which stories, scenes or particular moments

7 Alexandrescu 2008.

8 Alexandrescu 2010, cat. P21–24.

9 Pinette 1993, cat. no. 83.90.91; Vendries 1999, 296–303.

10 An eloquent example is provided by the wall painting in the *columbarium* under the Villa Doria Pamphili in Rome; Bendinelli 1941.

11 Reinsberg 2006, no. 115, pl. 103/3–4; Wegner 1966, cat. 83, pl. 112 c.

were being depicted, especially in scenes which combine more than one action (such as battle and sacrifice). The artist may have highlighted, for example, the most important figure in a scene, or represented a particular moment of the narrative by showing the musician playing or holding an instrument. Written sources make it clear that the instruments they name were capable of carrying such symbolic meaning.[12] In both images and texts it was probably assumed that the viewer or reader would understand the significance of the details. But since those meanings are no longer available to us, the true connotations of depicted instruments may remain obscure.

4 Musicians and musical instruments

Based on the extant corpus of monuments it is possible to distinguish several categories of musical instruments and the people playing them. Mythological themes remain problematic, for the meanings they attracted in Antiquity are not yet clear; consequently any interpretation must be regarded as subjective.[13] 'Brass' instruments, which we assume to represent the *cornu*, *tuba* and *lituus* of the ancient writers, are shown in the context of processions of different kinds, of *funus*,[14] of battle, or in the arena.[15] The *tubicen* is also present in scenes of mythological battles, usually in one of the upper corners of the composition, on the principal face of a sarcophagus. Stringed instruments of various shapes are very common in compositions with a mythological theme. These instruments also appear on some of the so-called *vita Romana* sarcophagi, depicting scenes from everyday life chosen in order to emphasize the virtues and good life of the deceased.

Amongst the most popular musical instruments, exhibiting numerous variations in shape and mechanisms, are the double pipes or *tibiae*. Such instruments are depicted in sacrificial scenes, near the altar,[16] in banquet scenes, where they are usually accompanied by other musical instruments, but also in religious processions, real or mythical. One of the variants of *tibiae* (the Phrygian *tibiae*) is known to be part of the cult inventory of the Great Mother Goddess, Cybele, in which context it is depicted together with the tambourine and the cymbals. It is shown among other defining elements on funerary monuments of her priests.[17] For the Egyptian goddess Isis the typical instrument shown

12 For for a detailed summary of different instruments and circumstances, see Wille 1967, passim.

13 Zanker and Ewald 2004, 9–27.

14 The term *funus* describes the whole ensemble of actions and processions that go to make up the funeral ceremony. For the procession led by a musical ensemble shown on a late 1st century BCE relief from a funerary monument in Amiternum, Abruzzo, see Fleischhauer 1964, fig. 25.

15 For a procession of Cybele-worshippers shown on the lid of a sarcophagus of about 360 CE, see Reinsberg 2006, pl. 103.3–4

16 For a sacrificial scene on the sarcophagus of an army general in the Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, from about 170 CE, see Reinsberg 2006, pl. 1.2.

17 The musical instruments used are known from written evidence: for example, from inscriptions and

is the *sistrum*. Its presence on funerary monuments is largely interpreted as an indication of the relationship of the deceased person to the Egyptian cults.

When the deceased was a musician and his or her instrument is referred to in an accompanying inscription, the depiction benefits our discussion to the extent that it connects a particular type of instrument with a particular instrument name. On military musicians' gravestones, which form an especially important category of evidence, inscriptions and visual representations may even identify the individual's name, rank or position. Funerary monuments of military musicians thus form a good starting point for identifying types of instruments used in the army, especially trumpets, since epitaphs from the late 1st century CE onwards mention the function of the deceased. On the other hand, it can be observed that funerary inscriptions of civilian trumpeters usually do not mention their profession.[18]

One should also bear in mind that each customized gravestone was uniquely made, and shaped and decorated according to diverse circumstances. The clients' tastes, the skill of the artist, regional fashions, trends in design and iconographical schemata, all no doubt contributed to the appearance of a monument, while even the seemingly straightforward representation of a musician on a gravestone accompanied by an inscription mentioning his or her profession has to be tested by means of comparison with further iconographic sources, in order to identify the specific shape of an instrument with its name.

Funerary monuments of players of wind instruments either show the instrument being held, but not played, or the instrument alone is represented, more often revealing only its essential identifying elements. By contrast, for players of stringed instruments the situation is somehow reversed, in that, at least on the monuments which we know, the deceased person is depicted either playing or preparing to play.[19] A stringed instrument is rarely shown on its own, but is more often seen together with the other instruments that the deceased played.

from the description of Catullus' *carmen* 63, 19–23 (1st century BCE). For an example of a funerary relief of a priest of Cybele, see Fleischhauer 1964, no. 40.

18 For depictions without mention of the instrument in the associated inscription, see Pinette 1993, cat. no. 40–41, 83, 90; Alexandrescu 2010, cat. G30. For inscriptions without a depiction of the mentioned musical instrument in the associated imagery: CIL III 10501.

19 For funerary monuments (mostly gravestones) of musicians that played wind instruments see Alexandrescu 2010, cat. G30–40, 43–49; for probably civilians: cat. G56–59; for grave monuments of musicians playing stringed instruments: Vendries 1999.

5 The meanings of the images and the roles of musicians and musical instruments portrayed

The importance which the Romans attached to the decoration of funerary monuments is known from several written sources, the best known of which is to be found in the writings of Petronius.[20] Several aspects may impact on the meanings we may read into such decoration.

The wealth of the deceased person together with his/her (usually his) social and sometimes political status, could all be expressed through images representing the spectacles and gladiatorial games which he/she had financed.[21] Since the number of musicians a family had been accustomed to hire was a further sign of its wealth and status, this too could be referenced, and it seems that it was. We often see, for example, groups of three musicians playing the same type of instrument: perhaps three *cornicines* (*cornu* players) or three *tubicines* (*tuba* players).[22]

Since at least the middle of the 1st century CE, *cornicines* are depicted performing in the arena, either alone or together with *tubicines*, accompanying the gladiatorial games; or with *tubicines* on the funerary monuments of municipal officials who had organized such games even in the 1st century BCE, before the amphitheatres became commonplace in city architecture. In Etruscan depictions of the 4th to 2nd centuries BCE the curved trumpet later designated *cornu* is often shown together with the straight trumpet *lituus*, typically playing a role in the so-called processions of magistrates. The proposition that the representation of these musicians must be indicative of status is confirmed by finds of actual instruments in the graves of wealthy Etruscans.[23] Later, the *cornu* was used by the Romans to signal the movements of standards and banners in military situations. Together with other instruments, mainly *tuba* and *bucina* (another curved trumpet), the *cornu* call in military camps was a part of the *classicum* signal ordered by the commanding officer. This call sounded every evening and occasionally at other times, as when the commanding officer issued orders to the entire unit. It is clear that this represents the adoption of an older, Etruscan tradition, where such signalling had been closely associated with the duties of the commanding officer, the *imperator*.

Representations of processions of magistrates and other officials are confined to Etruscan, late Republican or early Augustan monuments. Their purpose seems to have been to emphasize the political status of the deceased person as officer or magistrate. One difference in iconography is shown by the accompanying musicians who are depicted. Conventionally termed *cornicines* and *liticines* (*lituus* players) these musicians provided

20 Petronius, *Cena Trimalchionis* 71–72. Mid-1st century CE.

21 For the reliefs of the tomb of the *sevir* Lusius Storax, see Ronke 1987, cat. no. 2. For the procession with musicians on a funerary monument from Pompeii, 20–50 CE, see Köhne and Ewigleben 2000, fig. 32.

22 Alexandrescu 2010, 101.

23 Alexandrescu 2008.

the musical accompaniment for different ceremonies and processions of the Etruscans, while in Roman times they were depicted playing together on only one representation of a *prothesis* (funerary procession).[24] The two instruments played a role representing the Etruscan magistrates: their players were included in the magistrates' staff, as were the *lictors* (the attending officers who carried the ceremonial devices known as *fasces*). On the other hand, only *tubicines* are to be seen on Roman funerary monuments, and then only in the context of circus ceremonies, the *pompa circensis*.[25]

Processions led by brass-instrument players are to be found on only three monuments: on the frieze of the Temple of Apollo Sosianus in Rome, on the small frieze of the Arch of Trajan in Benevento[26] and on the lid of a late Roman sarcophagus from Rome.[27] On Italic tombs of city magistrates we find only the *pompa circensis* represented, in which the portrayal of musicians bears similarities to that of musicians shown in the triumphal procession, or *pompa triumphalis*.[28] A triumphal procession consisted of three parts: the part featuring the plunder and captives; the part featuring the victor, followed by sacrificial animals and by officials, and finally the part featuring the army or representative elements of it. According to the texts, musicians seem to have accompanied all three parts. It is unclear what each of the three groups was meant to play; but it is conceivable that the *cornicines* and *tubicines* walked alongside the soldiers, the *tubicines* were stationed at the beginning of the procession as well as with the sacrificial animals, with the victor, and with the *fercula*: the carrying platform bearing the booty and prisoners. It cannot be concluded from the evidence whether the procession was accompanied only by the official musicians of the city or whether – at least for the third part – there were military musicians as well. Nevertheless the *tubicen* is the musician otherwise connected most closely with war, victory and triumph,[29] both in real and in mythological representation.[30]

Wealth, epitomised by contentment and the enjoyment of life, was represented through other iconographic choices on funerary reliefs. One of these choices was to

24 For the relief from Amiternum (end of the 1st century BCE) see Franchi 1966; Fleischhauer 1964, fig. 25. Now in the museum at L'Aquila, it shows the funerary procession led by a musical ensemble. For the relief from the funerary monument of the Haterii (Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano, end of the 1st century CE): Sinn and Freyberger 1996, no 5, pl. 8.

25 For the relief from a funerary monument in Pompeii (Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, 1st century CE), see M. Junkelmann in: Köhne and Ewigleben 2000, 72 with figs. 32, 58, 59.

26 For a description of the musical instruments and further literature see Alexandrescu 2010, cat. S14 and S9.

27 Rome, basilica of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, ca. 360 CE. Reinsberg 2006, no. 115, pl. 103/3–4.

28 Künzl 1988, 14–18; Alexandrescu 2010, 100–102.

29 For an athlete and *tubicen* (trumpeter) shown in the act of performing, on a fragment from the sarcophagus of an athlete, second half of the 3rd century CE, see Amedick 1991, pl. 86.2.

30 Relevant topoi include actual combat, for example on sarcophagi bearing scenes of battle, and the imagined fights and contests that are to be seen in depictions of Amazonomachia, Achilleus and Pentesilea. For imagined fights and contests, see for example one 'garland sarcophagus' in Ostia (1st half of the 2nd century CE): Herdejünger 1996, no. 50.

insert an image of a banquet or scenes typical of daily life, involving such additional persons as ensemble musicians (playing the panpipes, *tibiae*, tambourine, *scabellum*,[31] sometimes a stringed instrument) and dancers.[32] Such elements are also to be found in the interior decoration of Roman houses.[33] The Roman citizen had to fulfill and demonstrate the fulfilment of certain civic duties and virtues, and this too could be expressed. One such aspect could be exemplified by the so-called general's (i. e. army commander's) sarcophagus or *Feldherrnsarkophag*, of which a fine example is preserved in the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.[34] There the deceased is presented in three scenes that we suppose are meant to be representative of key elements of his life: performing a sacrifice, attending his wedding and acting as a merciful general. The same virtues (*virtus*, *fides*, *clementia*) could also be expressed through mythological subject matter.[35] One of the most eloquent cases of a musical instrument with persistent mythological association is the *tuba*. Since Hellenistic times this straight, trumpet-like instrument had been a symbol of warfare and, *in extenso,* of battle, of athletic contests and of victory. Its Greek equivalent was the *salpinx* – characterized by the hollow, globular shape of its bell and depicted on many red-figured vases where it is shown being played by the Greeks, Amazons and Barbarians. Later Hellenistic tradition passed down a slightly different instrument, of several parts attached by rings and with a more or less conical bell. Such instruments are shown in representations of mythological scenes, historical battles, and on *tropaia*.[36] The Romans seem to have adopted them (in their Hellenistic form) from one or another of the Mediterranean peoples, perhaps by way of the Etruscans, who had apparently borrowed it from a similar source earlier. The famous 'Tyrrhena tuba' much praised in the ancient sources and an instrument considered by Roman authors to be an Etruscan invention, is in my opinion a different one whose Etruscan name is not known. Some modern scholars call it a *lituus*, an ancient Roman word, but the instrument is clearly

31 An ancient percussion musical instrument consisting of two metal plates hinged together, and so fastened to the performer's foot (like a sandal) that they could be struck together as a rhythmical accompaniment.

32 For a standing figure flanked by a *tibicen* (*tibia*-player) on a gravestone from Matrica (Százhalombatta), Hungary, 120–150 CE, see Topál 1981, fig. 10.

33 For the gravestone from Matrica (Százhalombatta, Matrica Museum, 120–150 CE) see Topál 1981, 98 no. 1, fig. 10; for the funerary monument from Intercisa (Budapest, Hungarian National Museum, 2nd century CE): Barkóczi et al. 1954, no. 103.

34 The corpus of known examples was dated to around 170 CE and includes a range of scenes showing the four main virtues (*virtus*, *clementia*, *pietas* and *concordia*) together with a general's principal achievements in relation to family, gods and community: see Reinsberg 2006, 19; Muth 2004. For the example in Mantua see Reinsberg 2006, no. 33. Also illustrative is one 'column sarcophagus' (sarcophagus with columns) in the Villa Albani; Reinsberg 2006, no. 123) where the very small figure of a *tibia*-player or *tibicen* completes the musical elements of the composition. The composition also includes a scene of sacrifice being performed by the deceased and his wife, as a manifestation of their *virtus* and *pietas*.

35 Zanker and Ewald 2004, 37–61.

36 *Tropaia* were monuments set up to commemorate a victory. Typically they take the shape of a tree, sometimes with a pair of arm-like branches (or, in later times, a pair of stakes set crosswise) upon which is hung the armour of a defeated and dead foe.

pre-Roman and its origin is disputed. The *tuba* is shown in representations of both historical battles and mythological conflicts. It can be found, for instance, in depictions of the famous Greek scene detailing the discovery of Achilles among the daughters of king Lycomedes, on the island of Scyros.[37] There, the story goes, the future hero is dressed as a girl and hidden by his mother Thetis. Intending to find him and bring him to the Trojan War, Odysseus and his companions offer presents, including some weapons, to the king and the princesses. After Odysseus' companions give a signal (a battle call) on the *tuba*, the king's daughters are then asked to choose from among the gifts something for themselves. On hearing the *tuba*, Achilles, still in his woman's attire, picks out the shield and the sword from among the presents and thus reveals himself to be a man and a warrior. This subject was a favourite theme of artists for almost a thousand years, between the 6th century BCE and the 5th and even 6th century CE. Moreover, it decorated the most diverse objects; from painted walls and mosaic floors, to sarcophagi, silver plates, pottery and glassware. Although the scenic compositions vary greatly, the figures of Achilles, Odysseus and the trumpeter, are always present.

The decoration of sarcophagi also embraced contemporary topics. Successful athletes, for example, would commission depictions from athletic contests. Well represented among surviving examples are scenes showing the moment when the winner was announced, a moment which we know was preceded by a tune played by the *tubicen*.[38]

Details of scenes that include a *tubicen* indicate that their iconographical compositions were partially or completely based on earlier models. It seems that the human figures in such scenes could be interchanged, since examples include individuals wearing clothes or armor, indicating gestures, or adopting body positions that are identical to those seen in some other representations. Likewise, the mythical battle scenes on some sarcophagi, depicting subjects like Achilles and Penthesilea, and the Amazons, were made using the same general compositional elements found in the scenes on other sarcophagi showing historical battles, whereas the figure of the musician was sometimes taken from a different tradition: for example those shown on sportsmen's sarcophagi.

The customized compositions of the late 2nd and 3rd-century 'Great Battle Sarcophagi', such as the Portonaccio and Ludovisi, are special cases.[39] On these the musicians – who are always placed in the upper part of the composition – point out the

37 Alexandrescu 2007, 101–110; Rogge 1995.

38 A very detailed depiction of the *tuba* can be seen on a fragment of a sarcophagus of an athlete (Vatican, Museo Chiaramonti, 2nd half of the 3rd century CE): Amedick 1991, cat. no. 276, pl. 86.2. For other examples of sarcophagi of successful sportsmen, see Amedick 1991, 88–90; Rumscheid 2000, 68–70; cat. no. 94, 99, 102 a, c; 107, 139.

39 For the Portonaccio battle sarcophagus (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, 180–190 CE) see Alexandrescu 2010, cat. P38; for the Great Ludovisi Sarcophagus (Rome, Musei Nazionale Romano, ca. 260 CE): Lachenal 1983, cat. 25; Alexandrescu 2010, cat. P36.

principal actor in the 'story' and the particular moments to be emphasized: the victorious *imperator*, the victorious Roman army. *Cornicines* it seems were never depicted in mythological scenes, and their depiction in battle scenes, especially on sarcophagi, indicates that such scenes were meant to represent real events. Moreover, the *cornicen*, being exclusive to Roman iconography, can be taken to indicate that a particular battle scene is, for example, not Hellenistic. By depicting real contemporary instruments, along with contemporary items of clothing and weapons, it was possible for the artist to link an unspecific scenic composition to a real and specific cultural milieu. In other words, the presence of the *cornicen* with his instrument and a Roman military standard identifies an otherwise generic battle scene as Roman. In sum, in Roman iconography the *cornu*, unlike the *tuba,* seems to serve a purely functional role, with no mythological or other connotations. Significantly, this also seems true of its treatment by Roman authors.

For music archaeologists, ancient descriptions of the Graeco-Roman myths can also be a useful source of evidence in trying to identify depicted instruments and explain their functions in more detail. Artists tend to portray a musician's torso, hands and head adopting more or less standardized positions. Application of the methodology of iconological analysis, especially to representations with similar or identical subjects, makes it possible to identify musicians or musical scenes represented even on fragmentary reliefs. For example, the presence of musicians can point to the overall subject matter, such as a battle or a particular myth, or even to a specific moment within the depicted story: a siege, perhaps, or a victory. This is an important asset in interpreting scenes where several successive events may be summarized in one representation.

One further aspect of Roman life in which music played a significant role was education.[40] In the Late Roman period the importance of emphasizing to the viewing public the educational level and general knowledge that an individual had attained seems to have been quite significant, judging from the number of monuments with depictions of men (and also, albeit rarely, of women) holding a scroll, known as a *volumen*, a sign not only of a person's ability to read and write but also of his/her intellectual and philosophical activity. Among women the evidence for educational achievement seems to have been more commonly expressed through musical activity, especially the ability to play a stringed instrument. However, there are also examples of men playing the same.[41] Among the existing examples mentioned here are the portrait on a sarcophagus in Civita Castellana of a young boy shown together with the Muses, depicted as virtuous *citharoedus*[42] and the group of sarcophagi with portraits of the so-called 'ménage

40 On the differences and the disputes regarding this aspect see Delattre 1998, 230–234; Vendries 1999, 327–333.

41 For the grave stone of M. Cincius Nigrinus from Selymbria, see Pfuhl and Möbius 1977, no. 306.

42 The deceased – a young boy, according to analysis of the skeletal remains – is depicted as one of the nine Muses or as Apollo. Museo Archeologico dell'Agro Falisco, mid-2nd century CE: Zanker and Ewald 2004, 239–240.

d'intellectuels':[43] the man as philosopher, the wife playing a lyre, a lute or a some other complex stringed instrument. On the 'sarcophagus of P. Caecilius Vallianus', so called for its later owner, the composition on the principal face combines a particularly rich and detailed banquet scene, including a portrait of the wife playing the lute, accompanied by a *tibicina*.[44]

How literally the depictions on these funerary monuments reflect reality – indeed, in what regard the ancients held such representations – is something that, at least within the period under study, underwent changes. Thus on the early monuments, the deceased is shown frontally, in full or three-quarters view, as if posing for a photograph in a studied attitude while focused on the viewer and not on other elements or characters in the field of representation. The image is intelligible to the viewer allowing scope for observation of the details and specific elements which have been chosen as characteristics of the deceased. Most of the monuments of musicians conform to this scheme.

On early monuments in regions such as Gallia Belgica, where the portrait of the deceased is placed within his/her family while simultaneously engaged in acts which represent his/her own field of work, both subject and family are presented facing the viewer.[45] In the ensuing centuries, the interaction between the characters in the scene is emphasized; indeed, scholars often remark on the 'joy of narrative' that characterizes this region and time. On sarcophagi and monuments found in Rome and throughout Italy, aspects of family life, and private life, are also rendered thematically. In the north-western provinces of the Empire, the difference is that the deceased is shown positioned in the middle of the group. Clearly, in such cases family life is being emphasized. During the second half of the 2nd century a transformation of 'visual language' takes place, resulting in numerous representations of the funerary banquet. In addition, a change can be observed in the scheme of the funerary architecture, which becomes a standardized and simple façade, without ornament, in which the benches of the *stibadium* form an integral and prominent part. The trend of the funerary milieu therefore becomes one of introspection, in which it becomes a place of commemoration for the family. In Gallia Belgica, on the contrary, the monument continues to address a public audience, even while the family theme becomes emphasized. The audience thus becomes, in a sense, a passive participant in *scènes de genre*, an indoors theme, in which the portrayal of a musician provides imagined sound and atmosphere. Whether in mythological compositions or in the series portraying the 'intellectual household', it is a scene which the viewer is invited to observe but not to participate in.

43 Marrou 1964, 210.

44 The main person depicted – the deceased on the *kline* – seems to have been a woman, judging by her breasts, and yet she is represented in portraiture as if she were a man (Vatican, Museo Gregoriano Profano, ca. 270 CE). See Amedick 1991, no. 286, pl. 15; for the stringed instrument see Vendries 1999, 128–130.

45 Rose 2007.

6 Sound in funerary reliefs, and soundscapes of societies

The narrative strategy of each picture is usually to combine several successive events into one scene, in which the differences between scenes and the identification of the precise moment is in each case made possible through the figure(s) of the musician(s), especially where they are shown playing their instrument(s). Naturally, their presence also gives an acoustic dimension to the representation. One example of this in practice can be observed on the official (historical) reliefs in Rome in which is shown a sacrificial ceremony, the *suovetaurilia*. This ceremony begins with a parade of the sacrificial animals and the sacrifice of incense and wine, then continues with the sacrifice of the animals. Musicians are at the head of the procession, in effect leading the ceremony. The emperor, the principal figure in the scene, is the focal point at all stages. However, in scene LIII of Trajan's Column in Rome he is shown standing near a small altar, celebrating the first, bloodless sacrifice. The fact that this particular sacrifice is the one taking place is marked by the figure of the *tibicen*, and its stages are indicated by the particular participants represented: the musicians leading the sacrificial animals while playing their instruments, and the persons who are to perform the sacrifice bearing the tools of their office.

Perhaps surprisingly, the moment of sacrifice of the animals is not itself depicted; indeed, it is a scene rarely found in any Roman representation. The most likely reason is that ancient viewers, being familiar with the structure of the ceremony, needed only a few symbolic details in order to identify the relief's intended meaning. For our present purposes, it is also important to note that the musicians shown playing instruments are always a part of the ceremony. From an iconographical point of view, they offer both a spatial reference (marching as they did at the head of the parade) and a chronological one (since their playing and processing inevitably transcends a mere moment in time), thereby allowing us to identify those episodes in the ceremony that are combined in the depiction. The composition of this scene, in this case depicted on an official monument in Rome, can also be found on monuments in Rome's provinces, such as in northern Italy and in Britannia.

In Rome and throughout Italy, as well as in some of the remoter provinces of the Empire, some funerary monuments bear representations of musical instruments that are of such high quality that they even contribute valuable details to our interpretation of excavated instruments. The especially large number and excellent condition of the depictions known from Italy may partly be explained by the long history of research there and partly by medieval and later peoples' interest in and awareness of such monuments that still survived. On the other hand, in other Roman provinces epigraphy attracted still more interest amongst scholars and collectors. Comparative analysis of these two sets of evidence, images and texts, is still needed in order to appreciate fully the different

viewpoints that they offer.

It should be noted however, that although chosen from similar thematic elements, the scenes may differ in the way figures as well as depicted instruments are structured within the overall composition. In most cases the instruments are those which seem to have been common to the geographical region where the monument was erected or where the artist came from;[46] that is, unless the choices were determined by the client (in other words, by the person commissioning the monument, and for reasons peculiar to that individual). When groups of musicians are found in mythological compositions, their instruments correspond to those depicted in real banquet scenes, on gravestones and mosaic floors.[47] The presence of the musician(s) in this case can be regarded as fulfilling the traditional requirements by showing the observance of the proper procedures: for sacrifice, for military discipline, and for any other activity with an established acoustic component. Musical sounds announced a procession's location as it progressed along a street, becoming louder as it got closer. One practical effect of this sound-making was that the sounds themselves helped all who heard them to be aware that the procession was in progress, and thereby to avoid accidental injury. Different tunes also marked and identified the different components of the event. The same can surely be imagined for manoeuvres on the field of battle and for day-to-day life in military camps.

7 Conclusion

The artistic depiction of music and musicians in funerary reliefs thus seems to have been used to indicate and often publicly celebrate the status, power and wealth of individuals and families, while the artistic conventions that they followed were more or less common in pre-Roman and Roman times. Standard forms of representation were used, paradoxically, to customize ancient iconography, in order to show due respect for the traditional requirements of specific ceremonies. They would also have conferred a new and original quality upon the relief itself, according to the particular way in which the artist composed and executed the representations. Given the subject of this volume, it is naturally tempting to see the quality of the sounds that are implicit in such scenes as a potential source of information about Roman society, and to wonder how far such sounds may have impacted upon, and may have been impacted by, official policy and legislation. From time to time we hear Roman authors reveal, for example, how high levels of sound emanating from processions and other public acts could be considered acceptable or unacceptable, according to circumstance and viewpoint. Unfortunately

46 A similar situation has been revealed for the painters of the Greek vases. See Bélis 1999, 210.

47 E. g. Kranz 1999, cat. 72, pl. 52.3.

the extent of official regulation, if any, is unclear from the surviving records. However, one might usefully ask whether the musical iconography of funerary monuments could tell us something equally useful about the political effect such monuments and their auditory implications had, or were intended to have, on the perception of viewers – since these would have included not only participants in family ceremonies but also the public at large. At the very least, we see sculptors using attainment and accomplishment as a means of publicly establishing identities and reputations, and by their compositions revealing music and sound to be among the most potent and favoured topoi appropriate to this image-building process. By the very permanence of their choice of medium too, marble, it is clear that they intend to project such image far beyond the familiar, transitory Roman present to posterity: a posterity of which, as it happens, we ourselves form part. It is therefore remarkable, and perhaps significant, how even for us some of their depictions bring the past so much to life, and draw us so effectively back towards their world. This is particularly true of those images that combine successive scenes into narratives, and those where musicians are shown in the very act of playing their instruments. Like silent films and comic strips, imagination lends them a virtual acoustic; and the more we learn of the instruments and music that they portray the more vivid these multimedia impressions become. However, for the present, our common heritage remains highly fragmented, and although the images may sometimes appear to offer suggestive clues, in the absence of written testimony they need to be interpreted with a critical eye as well as an imaginative ear.

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